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*Erasmus*

**Women, Workers, Humans: The Road to Decent  
Working Conditions for Domestic Workers in  
Indonesia**

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## List of Acronyms

ILO	International Labor Organization
Jala-PRT	Jaringan Nasional Advokasi Pekerja Rumah Tangga (National Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy)

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the exploration of the understanding of decent working conditions for domestic workers in Indonesia. The concept of decent working conditions as defined by the International Labour Organization is extensively used in this study. Through a qualitative approach, ten Indonesian domestic workers were interviewed, of whom four are affiliated with the union and six are not. The findings of this study reveal that there are similarities and differences among these Indonesian workers about their understanding of decent working conditions, especially for those who are part of the union and those who are not. Nevertheless, they share one commonality: financial difficulties made them enter the domestic worker job sector. While many believe a standard salary can be considered a decent working environment, after a thorough exploration, these Indonesian domestic workers also have other needs, such as being able to work in a safe environment without any mental harassment and having time off and holidays. The contribution of the union to shaping the understanding of decent working conditions for domestic workers is also discussed in this study. Lastly, the most interesting finding is that being included in the family, according to Indonesian domestic workers, is important, and they consider this as decent. In conclusion, these findings created a big question: “What is the real definition of decent work conditions?”

## **Keywords**

Domestic workers, decent working condition, domestic worker’s perspective, reproductive work, Marxist-feminist

# Chapter 1

## Why Domestic Worker? A Prologue

*“Domestic worker also becomes a silent bystander in moments of absolute intimacy and an addressee of emotions and feelings circulating in the household” (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2014:49).*

When I was little, my parents were busy working, so they did not have time to take care of me on a daily basis. So, I grew up with my domestic workers. At that time, I had two domestic workers, in which one of them is still working with my family until now. I called my domestic workers as “*Mba*”, which is a term that can be used to call an older sister.

My domestic worker who took care of me has been working with my family for about 19 years. She started working with my family when I was just 8 years old, in which I always considered her as part of the family. I have never once thought of my domestic worker as someone who is working in my house because they took care of me like my own parents or siblings, and we have a very close bond. She saw me growing up in every stage of my life, from a little kid, teenager, until I am an adult now.

Until recently, when I started my master’s journey at the International Institute of Social Studies, I have come to realize that I needed to improve my perspective towards my domestic worker. I took the class Gender at Work that discuss about domestic worker and it made me reflect a lot on my thoughts, my standpoint, and my beliefs. I did not realize how invisible my domestic worker was. I thought that by respecting her and treating her like my own family were enough. Maybe my domestic worker had no problem with how my family treated her and welcomed her as part of the family, but because I now know that the work that she does is really important, I want to respect her as a worker.

Imagining walking on her shoes, working for the same family for the past 19 years in the same space with the same people, doing the same job again and again, made me realize that it takes another level of patience and endurance to do that.

I discovered that the term that domestic workers are doing is called “reproductive work”. Reproductive work was such an unfamiliar term for me, and in my experience, looking at my friends and my community, this term is more or less invisible to many people. I realized that my background as a financial economist played a big role in building my worldview and my understanding of certain job sectors because I had never thought of looking at domestic work as a real job. We were never taught that they are part of what makes the economy and society stronger. It has always been about GDP, profits, development, and so on, but we never talk about the people who work in a shadow, like domestic workers, when in fact they are pretty much the backbone of this productive economy. Without them, people who work 9–5 jobs would not be able to have the freedom to do what they want.



When I was still exploring about domestic workers, I came across Bastari's (2018:45) research that explained that "domestic workers cannot also be seen as working for the users because they do not provide economic value in form of profits like factory workers provide benefits to factory owners." His research brought a new insight, and it made me reflect on myself and the reasons why domestic workers have always been in the shadows and invisible to society.

In constructing this research, I will use my personal experiences and reflections as part of autoethnography to help with my analysis and in-depth exploration. I acknowledged that my positionality as someone who employs a domestic worker will create a strong power relationship in developing this research, but as Løgstrup (1956:53 in Brinkmann, 2007:130) stated "It is impossible to avoid having power over the person with whom we associate". Thus, by recognizing my position, I will try my best to put myself in their position and to understand their stories.

I hope that with this research, I will be able to bring voices to the Indonesian domestic workers through their stories and their experiences, their voices that are unheard, that we are often underly because we seldom pay attention to them. However, this research is not covering and will never be representing all of the domestic workers in Indonesia, but it will still bring voices to some of the Indonesian domestic workers through their stories and their experiences, and this can still be something that we can learn.

# Chapter 2

## Being Domestic Workers in Indonesia

### 2.1. The Problems

“Servant”, “maid”, and “helper” are terms that are usually given to domestic workers in Indonesia. Before being known as domestic worker, or in Indonesian *Pekerja Rumah Tangga* (PRT), the term *Pembantu Rumah Tangga* (PRT) or household servant was commonly used and normalized in Indonesia (Gastaldi et al., 2022:120). Even until now, the term household servant remains mainstream and broadly used. In 2015, International Labor Organization (ILO) released a report that there were about 4.6 million of domestic workers in Indonesia, however, the National Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy (Jala-PRT) through their rapid assessment found that in actual there were more than 10.8 million of domestic workers in Indonesia and 67% middle to middle upper class families in Indonesia employed domestic worker (Ujianto, 2019:112). In addition to that, Statistic Indonesia stated that 90% of domestic workers in Indonesia are dominated by women (ANTARA News, 2023).

According to Editorial Jurnal Perempuan (2017:3), many domestic workers in Indonesia originate from rural areas and migrate to cities because of their background of poverty and low education. Due to their low levels of education, a lot of Indonesian domestic workers are not aware that the job that they are doing can be considered a real job, as a result, they work without clear or no work contracts (Editorial Jurnal Perempuan, 2017:3). Additionally, because of the stereotypes that associate domestic work as natural women’s work, “feminine virtue”, and tasks that are usually performed by mothers without getting paid (Editorial Jurnal Perempuan, 2017:3), domestic work is still widely not considered as real work. Their social status also put domestic workers at the bottom of the social strata (Hikmawan and Ramadhan, 2022:787). Most Indonesian employers also apply a system in which they see and treat their domestic workers like their own family by having them live in their house (Jordhus-Lier, 2017:247). This further blur the lines between working and not working, being included and not included, and being part of the family while at the same time an outsider.

The high number of domestic workers in Indonesia suggests that this type of job has the potential to become a formalized sector, offering employment opportunities, especially for women. However, according to Jordhus-Lier (2017), the contribution of Indonesian domestic workers to society is still limited and is not seen as adding value to the economy, which is why society does not consider domestic work a real job. In reality, domestic workers play a significant contribution to both the society and the economy. As mentioned by Bastari (2018:46), “Domestic workers allow the wheels of economy to run.” The presence of domestic workers not only allows employers to be more productive and generate more economic value, but they also offer crucial caregiving and housekeeping services, in which they might not be able to manage if they have to include household chores in their daily activities.

As society still does not recognize domestic work as a legitimate form of employment, until now, the working conditions for domestic work are still far from being acceptable (Pelupessy, 2017:228). From 2017 to 2022, Jala PRT recorded 1,635 cases of multi-violence against domestic workers in Indonesia which resulted in fatalities. Apart from that, there were 2,021 cases of physical and psychological violence, and 1,609 cases of economic violence (such as non-payment or withholding of wages) (Metrotvnews, 2022). This shows that many violations often occur towards domestic workers as currently, there are no specific regulation to regulate domestic worker's work arrangement, protection, and rights. Adding to that, violations might occur due to the domestic workers' workspace as they tend to live in their employers' house. This situation makes them invisible and not exposed to inspection or interaction with their co-workers. As stated by Peggie Smith in "Introduction: Regulating Decent Work for Domestic Workers," it is still hard to recognize and to regulate homes as workplaces, especially when the homes are not the workers' own (Blackket, 2017:36).

Hofi et al. (2013:5) discussed that due to the non-existence of regulation on the minimum wage, most Indonesian domestic workers usually receive payments less than the country's standard minimum wage. Azhari and Alim (2021:179) also stated that many domestic workers in Indonesia received wages less than 1 million rupiah (64 USD), which is way below the standard national minimum wage set by the government. Furthermore, even with the low wage, they also have to work for excessive long hours, which can be up to 14-18 hours a day (Bastari, 2018:38), and they also have to endure having no holidays, annual leave, or time off during the weekend (Ujianto, 2019:120).

Several laws in Indonesia actually have the potential to address the rights of domestic workers, but up to this point, these laws have failed to recognize and regulate domestic workers in Indonesia. The first law is Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower. This law was intended to stipulate standard rights for workers in Indonesia, but failed to cover domestic workers in their scope, as their work is not considered to produce tangible objects or services that provide added value to economy (Hanifah, 2020:198). The second law is Law Number 23 of 2004 concerning the Elimination of Domestic Violence. This law is the only law that explicitly recognize domestic workers in one of its clauses, but this is due to the fact that the law focuses on domestic violence, where domestic workers are considered to be part of the family (Afifah, 2018:61). The third law is Regulation of the Minister of Manpower No. 2 of 2015 concerning Protection of Domestic Workers. This regulation has the potential to be a legal breakthrough to protect domestic workers, but the government has not yet been able to implement the regulation as the legal framework is still weak to provide optimal legal protection for domestic workers (Ismiatun and Alamsyah, 2017:138). Moreover, the focus of this regulation tends to center more on the provisions of the Channeling Agency rather than addressing the rights and interests of domestic workers (Azhari and Halim, 2021:185).

Despite the lack of laws that recognize domestic workers, the House of Representatives in Indonesia issued a draft of the Domestic Worker Protection Bill in 2004. This proposed law aims to specifically address the rights of domestic workers in Indonesia and is expected

to officially recognize domestic work as a formal job. However, the bill has yet to be formally legalized. According to Jala-PRT, the bill has undergone 78 revisions since it was first drafted in 2001. The revisions have ranged from following the standards of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 189 on domestic workers' protection to simply regulating the basic protections of domestic workers in Indonesia. Many organizations, such as Jala-PRT and Sapu Lidi, have voiced their advocacy to push the government to finally legalize the domestic protection bill after about 19 years since its initiation (Project Multatuli, 2022). President Joko Widodo has expressed his assurance that the bill will be passed this year (Viva, 2023).

According to ILO through Domestic Workers Convention 2011 (No. 189), a decent working condition for domestic workers should include various aspects, such as having a contract, minimum wage, no deductions in their wage, access to employment benefits, a standardized working hour, provision of annual and sick leave, standardized facilities, among others. However, even with the existence of the convention, it does not guarantee that domestic workers themselves understand their entitlement to such standards in their work, which is why a lot of domestic workers often lack bargaining power and remain unaware of their rights (Afifah, 2018:54). Muryanti et al. (2015:449) discussed that due to the long-standing cultural history, many Indonesian domestic workers form emotional attachments to their employers. This bond is influenced by a cultural practice called "*ngenger*," where families would send their daughters to work in other households in exchange for education and improved living conditions. As a consequence, many domestic workers in Indonesia tend to prefer a familial relationship rather than a formal employer-employee relationship (Muryanti et al., 2015:450). This situation makes it increasingly difficult for domestic workers to be recognized as workers like formal workers and makes their relationship with their employers more ambiguous, which ultimately results in work relationships resulting in an absence of measurable worker rights (Hanifah, 2020:195).

## 2.2. The Need to Understand Them

Gastaldi et al. (2022:121) discussed that many of domestic workers in Indonesia embody multiple marginalized identities, such as they were mostly women, from low-income households, and they were usually internal migrants from areas with low levels of educations. Understanding domestic workers from their point of view is important because through their stories we can learn about their needs, whether they are satisfied with their working conditions, or what is it that they really want to improve when they work as a domestic worker.

Harding (2005:221) discussed that, "The activities of those at the bottom of such social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought - for *everyone's* research and scholarship - from which humans' relations with each other and the natural world can become visible. This is because the experience and lives of marginalized peoples, as they understand them, provide particularly significant *problems to be explained* or research agenda." In addition to that, Harding

(2005:222) also mentioned that “if we start from women's lives, we can generate questions about why it is that it is primarily women who are assigned such activities and what the consequences are for the economy, the state, the family, the educational system, and other social institutions of assigning body and emotional work to one group and "head" work to another.” Harding’s (2005) study actually applied to domestic workers in Indonesia, because not only are they considered to be a marginalized community, but they are also “primarily women,” and they are usually the ones who are assigned to domestic work. As mentioned in the previous section, domestic workers in Indonesia are prone to various types of violence, including economic, psychological, and sexual harassment. Even with the risks, many women still choose to pursue this job, and why is that so? Therefore, this research will bring out their voices through their stories in order to really understand them as well as making them more visible in scholarly discussion.

Through this research, I aim to discover how well the Indonesian domestic workers understand their entitlement as workers and how well they understand decent working conditions. Employing domestic workers is something that is common for the people in Indonesia, but despite this, many people are not aware that domestic work should also be recognized a legitimate job. People tend to overlook the importance of domestic work in sustaining the economy and productivity of society, and the term “reproductive work” is still unfamiliar to most Indonesians. Ironically, as discussed above, most domestic workers in Indonesia also do not recognize themselves as workers, but they consider themselves to be helping one family, which is why they are invisible as workers and work in a shadow to help this productive world.

Understanding the Indonesian domestic workers’ point of view on how they see decent work is crucial, because despite the discussion and debate on what decent work should be, we should also know what they truly need when they decide to enter domestic work. They might have different lenses in seeing and understanding their jobs, and this is important in order to figure out what is right for them, especially if the Domestic Protection Bill will be passed and implemented for them later on.

## 2.3. Research Question

*“How do Indonesian domestic workers<sup>1</sup> understand decent working condition?”*

With all the problems surrounding domestic workers in Indonesia, it brought me to this research question. As this research is exploratory, this research question is only a big umbrella to guide me into exploring the stories of the domestic workers that I interviewed. My main

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<sup>1</sup> Here to make it simpler, I used the term “Indonesian domestic worker” to refer to my research participants who came from Jakarta, Banten, Depok, Lampung, and Makassar. . I will use this term throughout my research, however, it is important to note that this research will not cover or represent all domestic workers in Indonesia.

goal, as mentioned already above, is to bring voices to the domestic workers in Indonesia and to really understand their needs from where they stand.

## **2.4. Relevance to Development Studies**

Quoting again from Bastari (2018:46) “Domestic workers allow the wheels of economy to run”, this research is relevant to development studies because domestic workers are a group of people who, even though considered invisible, actually make a really big contribution to society. Additionally, this study will not only highlight the stories, voices, and viewpoints of Indonesian domestic workers, but it will also contribute to a greater understanding of decent working conditions among domestic workers in Indonesia. Furthermore, it adds to the field of gender studies by addressing gender injustices in the workplace and bringing the Marxist feminist perspective on domestic workers.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology and Methods**

#### **3.1. Qualitative Interview**

To obtain the stories of domestic workers in Indonesia, this research adopts a qualitative interview as a tool for data collection through a semi-structured, in-depth interview method. A semi-structured interview was conducted because I wanted to gain a comprehensive understanding of Indonesian domestic workers' experiences, giving them the freedom to talk about themselves while also addressing my research question. My interview questions consisted of 10 sets of open questions that I did not necessarily have to follow, but I used them as a way to communicate and to obtain information needed for my research. As Bernard (2011:156) discussed, a semi-structured interview is conducted by following the question guidelines while still providing the participant with the space to talk more and expand their responses; thus, this method will allow me to maintain consistency with the set of guiding questions while at the same time facilitating an in-depth exploration through the conversations with the domestic workers. In addition to that, this method proved to be time-efficient (Bernard, 2011:158), which was advantageous during the data collection period, as the domestic workers that I interviewed mostly had limited free time, especially for those who live with their employer.

#### **3.2. Process of Obtaining the Data**

The data collection for this research was conducted for over one month, from August to September 2023. As this research is an exploration of Indonesian domestic worker experiences, I conducted interviews with ten domestic workers in Indonesia. The participants consisted of six domestic workers who were not affiliated with any organizations or unions and four domestic workers who were from Jala PRT.

The process of obtaining the data was not an easy task, or even difficult, because initially I had planned to use the snowball sampling method to reach out to domestic workers who were not affiliated with unions, but in the field, it turned out that using the snowball sampling method to gather the participants was not applicable within the network of domestic workers that I was familiar with. Similar to the domestic workers who were not part of the union, it was also hard to obtain participants who were from the union. This was because I did not anticipate the obstacles to contacting an organization that is currently actively engaged in campaigns and demonstrations to defend the rights of domestic workers in Indonesia.

When gathering the data from domestic workers who are not part of the union, at first, I had intended to ask my domestic worker to introduce me to her friends who were also a domestic worker. However, little did I know, my domestic worker actually had limited social

life and did not know anyone that also work as a domestic worker. The situation was similar with the domestic worker my brother employed. This was probably because both of my domestic worker and my brother's domestic worker were live-in domestic workers, where they both live in my house and my brother's house. Consequently, I had to change my method in collecting the data and decided to reach out to my friends and my families who employed domestic workers and asked them whether I could interview their domestic workers. I acknowledged that this was my limitation because of the presence of strong power relations between my respondents and me, and there was also a risk that the domestic workers that I interviewed would not be comfortable sharing their experiences. Nevertheless, I also see this as a good finding because, in reality, within the network of domestic workers that I was familiar with, they have limited opportunity to socialize, and their lives were constrained by limited mobility where they only move between their employers' house and their hometowns, especially for the live-in domestic workers. Furthermore, I realized that even if I had successfully used snowball sampling to find my respondents, there would always be power relations between me, as the researcher, and my respondents. This is because, despite my attempt to make my respondents feel comfortable while talking to me, they may still perceive me as an outsider. Despite not being able to use snowball sampling method for all of my participants, I managed to obtain one participant through a connection with one of the domestic workers that my extended family employed. This one domestic worker was the only participant that I did not know the identity of their employer.

As for domestic workers who are part of the unions, I contacted them through Jala PRT, which is the biggest domestic workers union in Indonesia and serves as the umbrella organization for all domestic workers unions in Indonesia. It was a tough process to obtain a permission to interview the domestic workers who were the member of this union. This is because, first, their responses were quite slow, which was expected as they were busy organizing demonstrations to the parliament for the ratification of the Domestic Worker Protection Bill. In addition to that, they have a more immediate material concern, which was to plan a hunger strike to commemorate Independence Day. Secondly, I tried to contact other unions, but they all referred me back to Jala PRT to seek permission. I also tried to approach some of the unionized domestic workers directly, but again, they advised me to ask for formal permission from Jala PRT. This process took more than a month, where I had to keep sending messages every three days to Jala PRT, before I was finally able to hear back from them, get permission, and receive contacts of domestic workers that were part of the union from them. I was finally able to interview four domestic workers from the union, one from Jakarta and three from Makassar. The process of obtaining the participants from Jala PRT was also an interesting finding, because, as it turned out, domestic worker organizations in Indonesia have strong ties; however, due to this, they have very strict policies and bureaucracies when people reach out to them to do interviews.

To collect the data, I conducted online phone interviews with all of the participants. Most of them preferred to be called at night, around 7 to 8 PM, Indonesian time; some also preferred to be interviewed during the day around lunch time, so I had to adjust the time difference, which was a 5-hour difference from the Netherlands. I decided to choose the



online phone call method because I wanted to make sure that my respondents felt comfortable discussing their experiences; apart from that, those who live with their employers did not have time to meet up directly. Some of my participants told me during the phone call that it felt like having a friend accompany them while they were working and did not feel like it was an interview, which made them open up about their hardships and discuss matters they could not typically share with anyone. Other than phone calls, I also sent text messages to some of them for missed questions or clarification purposes.

### 3.3. Participants

**Table 1. List of Participants Interviewed**

No.	Name	Union/Non-union	Live in/Live out	Works in	Hometown	Type of job
1.	Mira	Non-union	Live in	South Tangerang	Lampung	Full time
2.	Dita	Non-union	Live in	Jakarta	Tangerang	Full time
3.	Anita	Non-union	Live out	Depok	Depok	Full time
4.	Syana	Non-union	Live in	Jakarta	Lampung	Full time
5.	Yani	Non-union	Live in	Jakarta	Banten	Full time
6.	Rina	Non-union	Live in	Jakarta	Lampung	Full time
7.	Yuni	Union	Live out	Jakarta	Jakarta	Part time
8.	Ari	Union	Live out	Makassar	Makassar	Part time
9.	Sita	Union	Live out	Makassar	Makassar	Part time
10.	Tina	Union	Live out	Makassar	Makassar	Part time

The above table shows the list of participants I interviewed for this research. As seen above, the majority of domestic workers who are not part of the union work full-time, except for Anita. Whereas domestic workers who are part of the union work part-time. Most of the non-union participants also live with their employer, further illustrating how they have limited free time and mobility to socialize beyond their employer's house or workspace.

It is also interesting to see that for those who are part of the union, they work part time, indicating that they have more time to meet people outside of their job and more freedom to socialize, as well as more time for themselves. All of the union members shared that they

were recruited to the organization because of their friends, who initially introduced them to the union, and later influenced them to join the organization.

### **3.4. Ethical Considerations**

In order to protect the privacy of my participants, I decided to anonymize their names, except for Yuni. I asked my participants about their preferences regarding anonymity, five of them told me that they preferred not to use their real names, and some of this came from the domestic workers who work with my families. The remainder said that it did not really matter to them, so, I decided to anonymize all of them. Yuni was the only one who requested not to anonymize her name because she wanted to be known for her story as she is also currently one of the pioneers from Jala PRT, who is also a candidate in the regional parliamentary election in Jakarta. Following the completion of this research, I will delete all of the interviews and data of my participants to protect their confidentiality.

## Chapter 4

# The Concept of Decent Work for Domestic Workers

This research revolves heavily on the concept of decent working conditions, so what is decent work? In 1999, the ILO introduced the term "decent work" to establish a standard for both formal and informal workers. Through this term, the ILO promotes employment opportunities, fair compensation, and the importance of a safe and healthy working environment. Four components that can measure the condition of decent work include "employment, social protection, worker's rights, and social dialogue" (GHAI, 2003:113). According to Hauf (2015:138), the introduction of decent work gained a positive response because of its inclusiveness towards non-standard employment, informal workers, and unpaid reproductive labour. Additionally, it challenges the male standard Fordism of employment and addresses the needs of informal workers, particularly female marginalized groups (Hauf, 2015:140).

With the launched of "decent work" term, the ILO also adopted this term to Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). The term of decent work can be found in the convention many times. It also incorporates the four components of decent work condition in a more detailed manner that is tailored for domestic workers need. In article 3 of Convention No. 189, it is stated that domestic workers should have the freedom associate and collective bargaining, elimination of forced labour, abolishment of child labour, and eradication of discrimination. Article 3 of Convention No. 189 is in lined with how ILO determined decent work, because it promotes worker's rights as well as social dialogue within domestic workers.

Article 7 of Convention No. 189 provides an even more detailed of standard working conditions that should be applied for domestic workers. This includes:

- the name and address of the employer and of the worker;
- the address of the usual workplace or workplaces;
- the starting date and, where the contract is for a specified period of time, its duration;
- the type of work to be performed;
- the remuneration, method of calculation and periodicity of payments;
- the normal hours of work;
- paid annual leave, and daily and weekly rest periods;
- the provision of food and accommodation, if applicable;
- the period of probation or trial period, if applicable;
- the terms of repatriation, if applicable; and
- terms and conditions relating to the termination of employment, including any period of notice by either the domestic worker or the employer.

In addition to that, Article 10 No. 1 of Convention No. 189 mentioned that domestic workers are entitled to equal treatment to workers in general especially in terms of working hours, overtime payment, paid annual leave, and periods of rest both daily and weekly.

ILO's Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 No. 189 will be ratified and incorporated to the Domestic Workers Protection Bill as the convention will serve as the minimum standard reference regarding domestic workers' rights in Indonesia (Komnas HAM, 2022). In line with C189, the bill proposes standardized working conditions that is created in the context of domestic workers in Indonesia. This standard working condition can be found in one of the articles of Domestic Workers Protection Bill (RUU PPRT), for example Article 11, which demands that Indonesian domestic workers have the rights to:

- practice their own religion;
- standard working hours;
- have annual leave;
- receive holiday allowance;
- receive social health security;
- receive employment social security;
- terminate their contract if the employer violate their contract agreement.

On top of all the lists that ILO's C189 describes on how decent working should be for domestic workers, according to Pape (2016:189), the most important outcome of the convention is to finally recognize domestic workers as workers. This is to prevent them from being exploited and undervalued if they work in an employment relationship (Pape, 2016:190).

In this research, ILO's C189 and the Domestic Workers Protection Bill will be used as a framework to guide a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to have decent working conditions. Both C189 and the Domestic Workers Protection Bill show what Blackett (2017:14) discussed that with these regulations or standards, domestic workers are recognized as workers because it compare their working conditions with any other work, treating them equally.

Despite the very extensive lists and definitions of decent working conditions, we cannot ignore the fact that the concept of decent working conditions is still lacking because, according to Lerche et al. (2012:20), ILO has no power to enforce these laws. Blackett (2017:15) mentioned that adopting this policy is hard because it has to challenge neo-liberal hegemony, and it is difficult to differentiate the working space for domestic workers since they work at home. Burchell et al. (2014:464 in Brill, 2021:17) made a critique of the methodology of how ILO measures decent work conditions because it is not comparable to every country, as some countries have more data while others do not even have sufficient data to compare the working conditions there. Apart from that, there is an ambiguity in the interpretation of how to measure decent working conditions, whether it is for individual workers, for the

characteristics of specific jobs, or for the entire job market as a whole. A research by Monteith and Gisbert (2017), found that according to informal workers, what makes a job “good” depends on the countries social, economic, and political condition. Brill (2021:18) argued that in order to assess the concept of decent work, there should be a recognition of worker’s personal experiences.

Furthermore, regardless the critiques and the contradictions, both C189 and Domestic Workers Protection Bill can pave the way for a better “decent” working condition for Indonesian domestic workers and be a starting point to transform the domestic workers working conditions. Brill (2021:22) discussed that “it is important to remember that others have welcomed the concept of decent work, arguing that its breadth and inclusivity opens up space for recognition for new groups of workers on the margins of the global economy, many of whom are women.”

Throughout this research, I will use the concept of decent working conditions that is explained by ILO as well as the critiques surrounding it. By following the ILO’s concept, I can analyze the understanding of decent working conditions for the Indonesian domestic workers that I interviewed and determine whether they understand that these sets of regulations can protect them as workers. At the same time, I will also include the critiques around the convention because it can help me understand them from their own point of view and what it really means for them to have decent working conditions.

## Chapter 5

### The Journey to Becoming Domestic Worker

Before delving deeper into the understanding of the working conditions for domestic workers in Indonesia, let me start with their journey on becoming domestic workers. Their journey is important to note because for this reason, they enter this type of job, which is classified as informal employment and is seen as working under the “shadow of people” (Bastari, 2018:48). I discovered that all the participants that I interviewed had the same reason on why they started to work as domestic workers, and that reason was financial difficulty. As discussed by Jurnal Perempuan (2017:3), domestic work is the type of job that is easy to enter for women as it is considered to be their job’s nature. The participants that I interviewed entered this job with little idea with the kind of reality they had to face, let alone the working conditions of their jobs. The participants may not have the time to even think about decent working conditions because they all believe that they work in order to survive and to be free from their financial difficulties.

There are some similarities among the ten participants on why they decided to become domestic workers. Some of the respondent shared that they previously owned small businesses in their hometowns but had to close it down due to of bankruptcy. One of my respondents, Mira (non-union), told me that she had to close her small business, which was a small shop, or we usually called it as “*warung*” in Indonesian, because it went bankrupt. However, because she had to repay a bank loan, she decided to try her luck and move from Lampung (her hometown) to Jakarta to work as a domestic worker. She told me that her husband’s salary was insufficient to pay back the loan while also covering her family’s expensed. So, she wanted to have a stable income by working as a domestic worker.

“I had a small business, but God says the other way around, my business went bankrupt. I have to pay back the bank and I was afraid I couldn’t eat if I had a debt to pay.”-Mira (non-union)

A similar story came from Yani (non-union), who decided to work as a domestic worker when her husband passed away, and her son was laid off from his job. She initially had a small shop, same with Mira (non-union), but had to close it down because the business did not go well. She also gambled her luck by going to Jakarta from Banten, without knowing anything about working as a domestic worker. She told me it was her first time working as a domestic worker and she decided to enter this job because she did not want to be a burden to her family, and she wanted to help her children by being financially independent.

“Because my husband passed away, my family faced financial problem. My first son was laid off and he couldn’t find a job and I still have a son who is still in high school. I have another son who is working but I don’t want to rely on him only.” -Yani (non-union)

Another story came from Rina (non-union) and Ari (union). Both of them told me that they decided to start working as domestic workers because they did not want to burden their families and because they wanted to help their families ease their family's financial difficulties. Rina began working as a domestic worker after she graduated from middle school. Her family was a farmer, and she faced financial difficulties to continue her education. She moved to Jakarta with her employer from her hometown, Lampung. Ari also shared a similar story, as she told me that she started working as a domestic worker after graduating from high school because she could not continue her education. However, she did not migrate to another city, as she still lives and works in Makassar.

“Because my parents are farmers, I wanted to help my family's economy. I don't want to be a burden for them, so after I graduated from middle school, I went to Jakarta to work.” -Rina (non-union)

“At that time, I had dropped out of school. I actually wanted to continue to high school but my parents couldn't afford it, so I tried to follow my cousin to work as a domestic worker.” -Ari (union)

For Yuni (union) and Anita (non-union), both of them started working as domestic workers because they could not rely on their husband's salaries to finance their families. Yuni (union) shared that at that time, her husband was unemployed, so she had to find a way to make money fast so her family could live. Meanwhile, Anita had no choice but to work as a domestic worker because she had to pay for her children's school tuition fees and her husband's salary was insufficient. She was previously a stay-at-home wife before working as a domestic worker.

“I had to do anything to help my husband because he was unemployed. I met my neighbor, and she offered me to become a domestic worker.” -Yuni (union)

“Because of COVID-19, my family's economy became difficult. My husband's salary was not enough, so I had to work. It was my first time working as a domestic worker.” -Anita (non-union)

The stories of how my participants started working as domestic workers show that they came from similar circumstances. They had little choice but to enter domestic work as it is the easiest or fastest job to secure in order to sustain and to resolve their financial situation. Additionally, as discussed already above, it is more convenient for my participants to work as domestic workers since it involved them doing household chores that they would normally carry out in their own homes. After knowing their stories on how they started working as domestic workers, the next chapter will bring us to the exploration of the understanding of decent working conditions, according to my participants. This will show what, despite having

similar reasons for working as domestic workers, their needs are as domestic workers and what they consider as decent working conditions.



## Chapter 6

### Having a Good Salary Means Decent Work?

ILO Convention No. 189 Article 11 mentioned that “Each Member shall take measures to ensure that domestic workers enjoy minimum wage coverage, where such coverage exists, and that remuneration is established without discrimination based on sex.” When I asked my participants about their understanding of ideal working conditions, surprisingly, most of them, both from the union and non-union, answered that on top of all the standard working conditions mentioned by ILO or Domestic Workers Protection Bill, they think that having a good salary (following the government’s standard) is enough to be considered as decent.

The level of understanding among my participants who are not part of the union might vary, but they also shared uniformity with those who are part of the union, which is their need for a better, standardized salary. This is not surprising as all of the participants shared that economic coercion shaped their entry to domestic work, or in other words, they need to work to secure a steady income that can support their families.

Based on the interview with my participants, some of them told me that they said they want to have a better salary as they mentioned that their current salaries were insufficient, especially for those who serve as the financial backbone for their families. Some domestic workers who are not part of a union, expressed that they worked tirelessly, yet their salaries were inadequate. They wished for their employers to increase their salaries, taking into consideration the amount of time they dedicate their time into working.

“If my employer really trusts me as a domestic worker and wants me to work here, I'm okay with her telling me to do a lot of work, but I want my salary to be higher because I need the money.” –Anita (non-union)

“Of course, I have many needs, especially because I’m a woman, but I have to send money to my family back home, so I have to find a way to manage my money, so it will be enough for both of myself and my family. But of course, right now I just need to be grateful that I can have a salary.” -Syana (non-union)

Similar to the participants who are not part of the union, Sita, a domestic worker who is part of the union shared that she thinks salary is the most important factor and should be considered as the top priority out of all the regulation in the Domestic Worker Protection Bill. Due to this, she said she wants the Domestic Protection Bill to be passed because the bill can set a standardized salary, so she doesn't have to negotiate with her employer regarding the salaries, as it currently varies depending on the employer.

“If the salary has been determined (in accordance with domestic workers protection bill), I don’t need to bargain with the employer anymore, but right now everything is up to the employer”.

“Sometimes our salary is still determined based on familial relationship, because they are usually too comfortable with us. Ideally, we should receive wage with according to the hours we spent working”.

-Sita (union)

Ari (union), also shared her view about decent working conditions for her:

“Yes, for me, at least the work should be a maximum of 8 hours with salary based on district minimum wage (UMK) or regional minimum wage (UMR).” – Ari (union)

As discussed in the previous chapter, all of the participants that I interviewed started working as domestic workers because of financial difficulties and domestic work provided an easy entry to the job market for them. Because of this, most of the participants think that having a proper salary is enough for them to be considered working in a decent working environment. Mentioned above, Hofi et al. (2013:5) discussed that most of domestic workers in Indonesia received wage less than the standard minimum wage set by the government. This is what really happened to one of my participants who told me explicitly about her salary. Anita (non-union) told me that her wage is around 1 million rupiah, which is actually less than the standard minimum wage in the province. Based on Table 2, because she works in Depok, West Java, her salary is supposed to be a minimum of 1.9 million rupiahs.

**Table 2. Summary of Minimum Wage in Provinces in Indonesia per Month**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Per month IDR</b>
Jakarta	IDR 4,901,798
Banten	IDR 2,661,280
West Java	IDR 1,986,670
Lampung	IDR 2,633,284
South Sulawesi	IDR 3,385,145

Source: WageIndicator.org

Their needs to have a better salary can be seen as the primary reason of why many of my participants regardless of their understanding of decent working conditions, still put salaries as their top priority. Maybe this can be explained through Marxist theory that says, “to be a worker means to lack access to the means of production, which is just to say that being a worker means to lack economic security” (Chibber, 2022:57). For these domestic workers,

their financial circumstances led them and exposed them to consider working as domestic workers. Additionally, because they need to make a quick cash to sustain their livelihoods, they saw domestic work as a solution for their problem, just like what has been discussed in Chapter 4 about their journey towards becoming domestic workers. In other words, the need to obtain a stable salary fast and work in a field that is easily accessible to enter is their getaway to enter the domestic worker sector.

Similarly, like non-union domestic workers, even though domestic workers who are part of unions understand the concept of decent working conditions and are educated about it, their main concern also often revolve around an improvement in salary. They also think that if they have a good salary, their work can be considered decent, and they can tolerate other aspects as long as they are paid well; thus, they consider this to be the most crucial factor of achieving decent working conditions. From this situation, it can be seen that because for most of my participants, both union and non-union, think that their salaries are not enough to be considered decent, they do not really pay attention to other aspects. Like what Anita (non-union) said that she is willing to do a lot of job as long as her employer can pay her well, because she needs the money to finance her children's needs.

Apart from that, even though the participants that are part of the union clearly understand about decent working conditions for domestic workers, as stated by ILO C189, or the Domestic Workers Protection Bill, we cannot deny that it is also hard for them to think beyond salaries, just like the domestic workers who are not part of the union. While it is beneficial for them to be aware and educated about decent working conditions for domestic workers, because of their primary concern of having a better salary, other factors of decent working conditions seem less substantial to them, or it is just a mere sentence that they do not know when they will finally achieve it, however this will be discussed further in the next chapter. This aligns with the prior discussion above, which says that according to Brill (2021:18), we have to recognize the worker's experience to really understand what it means to have decent work for them.

Back to Sita's (union) statement, where she said she does not want to bargain anymore. For domestic workers who are part of a union like Sita (union), because they are educated and understand about decent working conditions, they have the tools and knowledge on how to negotiate their salaries so they can at least experience decent working conditions. However, they also think that it is better to have a standard salary because they do not have to tirelessly negotiate (like Sita said). Because of this, some of the participants from the union expressed that their employers should be educated about the concept of decent working conditions too. Meanwhile, domestic workers who are not part of the union do not have the bargaining power to ask for a higher salary. Take the example of Anita, (non-union) who has to accept that her salary is way below the standard salary of the province.

All things considered, because all the participants enter domestic work because of their financial difficulties, after working as domestic workers, they told me that they can at least

help their husband, send money back home to their families, be financially independent from their parents, and pay off their debts. Domestic workers might not be an ideal job for them because the salaries are still according to the employer's capabilities, but for some of them, it gave them a stable income that they desperately needed before entering this job. However, even though salary is their top priority, these domestic workers also have other needs when salary is not a problem anymore, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

### Beyond Salaries

*“In reality, outside in the field, not everyone gets to experience working in a decent environment. You see, there are a lot of people whose workload is excessive, and their wages don’t match the workload, there are a lot of violence happening. I hope we can get to work in decent working conditions.” (Yuni, from Jala-PRT)*

To have a standardized and sufficient salary by following at least the regional minimum wage might be enough to form the idea of decent working conditions for Indonesian domestic workers, but we cannot deny that they also need other aspects that can make them think that their job is decent. In this chapter, I will explain in great detail the understanding of decent working conditions according to my participants other than salaries.

After talking to my participants about salary, I asked them what other factors they thought could make their job decent. It turns out that their understanding of decent working conditions is not only fixated on salaries but also on many factors that can be found aligning with the standard working conditions according to the ILO’s Domestic Workers Convention No. 189, or the Domestic Workers Protection Bill. During the interview, the participants explicitly and implicitly talked about their needs as workers. The big topics that I could summarize based on their interviews are surrounding mental harassment, working hours, and sexual harassment. Apart from that, the participants who are affiliated with the union also mentioned the role of the union in educating them more about their understanding of decent working conditions.

#### 7.1. Mental Harassment

Other than salary, during the interviews, many of the participants told me about their stories of having to deal with their employers. Their stories generate many findings that I can relate to the topic of mental harassment. Based on their interviews, I can derive that for them, decent work also means working in a place where they can feel safe and be treated well by their employer.

Yani (non-union) for example, told me explicitly that she received bad treatment from her employer. While she did not clearly state that what she was experiencing was mental harassment, from her story, I could feel that she had to endure a kind of treatment that should not happen to a worker. She told me that her employer was often in a bad mood, and they usually started to nag at her. Her employer often got mad at her regarding food. They demanded that she finished cooking around 5 AM and put the foods on the table around that time, even though her employer would not eat them until lunch time. She told me that it was really tiring for her to think about what kind of foods she has to cook every day because

her employer does not really tell her what to do (e.g. what to cook) or brief her about her job, but they have such high expectations and put the burden on her.

“I usually finish cooking in the morning, but my employer would only eat it at lunchtime. Sometimes I’m out of ideas of what to cook, so I cook the same menu again and again, but they will start to get mad at me. I asked them what kind of foods they wanted, but they always asked me to think by myself.” -Yani (non-union)

There was also a time when her employer called Yani (non-union) a thief because she did not consult with her employer about whether she could use certain cooking ingredients in the refrigerator, even though she used them to prepare meals for her employer.

“I did not understand because my employer always gets mad about foods. That one time we had no food at home because we just came back from an event, my employer’s daughter asked me to cook for her. We only had the ingredients that I have to ask permission to my employer if I want to use it, but I decided to cook it because I had no choice and it’s for her daughter, I thought she would understand. But when she went home she started to get mad at me and called me a thief.” -Yani (non-union)

Other than that, Yani (non-union) told me that she also often thinks of leaving her job because, at times, her employer asked her to feed them, as in how a mother feeds their baby (putting foods in their mouth), claiming they were too busy working and couldn't take a break to eat lunch by themselves. Because of this situation, she told me she could not take it anymore because she often felt humiliated and embarrassed.

“I am so embarrassed and grossed out whenever my employer’s daughter asks me to feed her. I don’t understand why she can’t eat by herself. She’s 28 years old.” -Yani (non-union)

Due to this, Yani told me that she sometimes wanted to make her story viral on the internet so other domestic workers wouldn’t have to experience the same thing as her. She told me that this should not happen to domestic workers as it is far from decent work conditions.

“Sometimes I want to make my story viral on the internet. Like for example in TikTok. I want to tell the government that this kind of employer exist. They might notice me or maybe the President can notice me.” -Yani (non-union)

Apart from that, another story from Anita, who also experienced mental harassment, told me that her employer sometimes shouted at her in front of many people when she did not work well, she felt very humiliated.

“(long sighs) I often feel frustrated with my employer. If I could, I really would like to resign from my job, but they won’t let me, and I need the money. There was one time when my employer scolded me in front of many people. I felt so humiliated.” -Anita (non-union)

Meanwhile, Yuni (union) shared her experienced when she was being mentally harassed. She explicitly said what she experienced was mental harassment. She knew the term “mental harassment” because the union educated her about this matter and made her aware of the types of treatment that employers do that can be considered mental harassment. She told me that her employer mentally harassed her as they suddenly cut her payment and forced her to leave the job because she was late to work for only 5 minutes even though she already told the reason to her employer.

“I was just late for 5 minutes, and they started to scold me and told me to resign from my job. I tried to fight back and asked them for my payment.”

From the stories of my participants, it can be observed that they also crave other factors that can make their job environment more comfortable, safer, and eventually decent. They want to work in a place where their employers can treat them as if they are workers, so they will not arbitrarily exploit them or receive unwarranted anger. This is probably where the ILO C189 comes into play, because the concept of decent work, according to them, is to actually prevent this from happening to the workers. In Article 7 of C189, for example, the ILO mentions the type of work to be performed by domestic workers, and the convention requires that there should be terms and conditions relating to the termination of employment, which shows that the Convention can prevent the situations that happened to my participants.

Additionally, it is quite interesting to hear the story from Yani (non-union) who wanted to make her stories viral on social media. Because of what she experienced while working as a domestic worker, she unconsciously displayed an act of resistance. It is quite surprising, considering she is not part of the union. This can actually relate to Marx’s theory on how “exploitation is built into the process of class reproduction. So even while the class structure brings social agents together around their material needs, it also locks them into conflict because exploitation tends to generate resistance” (Chibber, 2022:2). Yani’s (non-union) experience and how her employer exploited her awakened her to wanting to fight for her rights, as she thinks that her working environment is far from decent. Her situation might actually indicate that, despite her saying that she is fine with working with her employer, in reality, her working environment is far from decent, until it made her think about rebelling against her employer.

Similar to Yani (non-union), Yuni (union) also showed some kind of resistance when her employer forced her to leave but she still insisted that her employer pay her severance. However, she could do this because she had knowledge from the union about what to do in this kind of situation. This actually illustrates that both domestic workers who are part of the union and those who are not in the union have similarities in some aspects. The difference is that those who are part of the union have more support and are more vocal about their resistance to their employer.

## 7.2. Working Hours and Holiday

Working hours, holidays, and having time off are also conditions that most of my participants talked about. When I asked about their working hours arrangements and whether they are allowed to have holidays, they started to talk about it and expressed how it is still insufficient for them. This may be attributed to the fact that most of my participants live with their employer, so there are no boundaries on when they start and stop working. As stated by the ILO (2021), “domestic workers are less likely to work within the range of normal weekly hours and are more likely to work very short or very long hours.” Bastari (2018:38) also mentioned that domestic workers in Indonesia typically have to work 14–18 hours a day. Due to this, my participants also perceive that being able to have time off and holidays is considered decent working conditions for them.

From the interview, I found that for Yani (non-union) and Anita (non-union), having time off and holidays were important for them. Even though both of them in the previous chapter think that having good salaries was enough, being able to rest and having the freedom to take time off were also important for them, especially for their well-being. Yani (non-union) shared that she did not receive any holidays or time off during the weekend. She said she did go home once a year and her employer allowed her, but when she asked for a day off during the weekend, her employer would not let her. The same thing happened to Anita (non-union), who has never received a holiday in the three years she has been working with her current employer. She did not even have annual leave because her employer would not let her.

“I hope people will listen to my suggestion about how employer should treat their worker, especially about the vacation leave for domestic worker, I think employer do not really paid attention to it, when in fact it’s something that we really expected as a domestic worker.”

“When I asked to have time off because I want to go out on the weekends, my employer sometimes mocked me. They said I wouldn’t be able to go anywhere because I don’t know anything about Jakarta.”

– Yani (non-union)



“But I've never been given the chance, from the first time I worked here. My employer always said I couldn't take a day off. They would not let me, I even have to come and work on Sundays. They always asked me to come.” – Anita, (non-union)

The same story also came from Ari (union). She told me that because there is still no regulation regarding domestic workers, sometimes her employer arbitrarily made her work for an extra one or two hours without additional payment. She said she could not refuse her employer as there is no regulation that she can refer to. Even for Ari (union) who is educated because she joined a union, she still could not get away from this type of treatment from her employer.

“But usually, I could not go home straightaway at 4 PM. There is always some extra work to do. Even though I worked here to take care of my employer's child, sometimes they asked me to cook too or wash the dishes. Because of that, I have to work for two or three extra hours without getting paid. They rarely let me go home at 4 PM.” -Ari (union)

Yuni (union) also mentioned that even for domestic workers who are part of the union, they still have to bear working for long hours.

“Before I joined the union, I had to work from 7 AM to 7 PM. It was really tiring. After I joined the union, I became more confident to ask my employer to let me go home after 8 hours of work. If I'm not strict with the working time, my employer will definitely give me extra work every day.” -Yuni (union)

Based on the stories of my participants, they demonstrate that, as workers, they need time to take a rest. Just like any other worker, domestic workers are also doing repetitive tasks that can lead them to burn out and stress. It highlights how their understanding of decent working conditions is actually beyond “just” salaries; however, due to the working conditions in Indonesia that are far from decent, salary became their primary concern.

This finding can actually correlate to my effort in Chapter 3, during the data obtaining process. I tried to gather my participants who are not part of a union through my domestic worker's network, but it turns out my domestic worker does not really have any friends who also work as domestic workers, and her social life is confined to only the area around my house and her hometown. This is also probably because my domestic worker resides in my house. Despite my parents allowing her to go out during the weekend or have time off whenever she wants, her everyday life is only limited to around my house, which is also her working space. In contrast to most of us, we have our social lives because we go to school or work, and because of that, we have the chance to meet many people. Thus, it can be seen

that working hours affect the everyday lives of domestic workers in Indonesia, especially for those who live with their employer, because not only do they have limited free time, but they also face challenges in socializing due to restricted mobility, which is probably why all of the domestic workers who live with their employers in this research are not affiliated with any union (see Table 1).

Unlike domestic workers who are not part of the union, domestic workers who are part of the union enjoy more freedom and space to socialize because they mostly work part-time (see Table 1). They can differentiate between their home and their working space because they do not live with their employers. Although they mentioned that their working hours are still not regulated and sometimes, they have to work extra hours, in comparison to those who live with their employer, they have more free time. All of the participants who are part of the union shared that they joined the union because their friend introduced them to it.

“Yes, I joined the union because one day my friend asked me to go with her to this meeting. It turned out this organization was full of domestic workers. I decided to join because I like to make new friends. And I did not realize I have been here for quiet sometimes now.” -Yuni (union)

“My friend was a leader of the union, because of her I joined the organization.” -Sita (union)

This underscores how social life and connection are important for these domestic workers. To sum up, working hours and being able to have a holiday or time off are also essential aspects that domestic workers in Indonesia need in order to finally achieve decent working conditions.

### **7.3. The Role of the Union**

In this section I will discuss the role of the union in making the domestic workers understand about decent working conditions. Concurrently, I will also address the topic of sexual harassment that one of my participants talk about when I asked her about decent working conditions.

The conversation about sexual harassment came to light when I asked about the understanding of decent working conditions among my participants. I did not ask them explicitly about whether they had ever encountered sexual harassment, but one domestic worker, Yuni, who is part of the union, told me about the sexual harassment she experienced as a domestic worker. She mentioned that she had experienced sexual harassment twice. The first incident did not involve her employer but a repairman. The repairman had been called to the employer's house to fix their roof. At that time, Yuni was asked to oversee the repairman, and she

was alone at home. Suddenly, the repairman hugged her and exposed his genitals to her. Her second experience involved her employer, who harassed her by touching her body when she was working. However, she felt the need to share her experiences.

"Yes, to be honest, every time someone interviewed me, I don't mean to ask for a pity when I talked about sexual harassment that happened to me. But you see, we should understand that this kind of violence often occurs in the domestic worker sector. It's just that many people can't speak out, because they are too afraid. Many also think that this is a taboo, which makes it embarrassing. But because I am in an organization, I want to reveal to people, so they will understand sexual harassment really exists and that I am a victim." -Yuni (union)

Being a member of the union, Yuni hoped that by sharing her story, she could make a difference someday, especially to advocate for domestic workers' rights.

"If we don't speak up and address the sexual harassment that is happening to domestic workers, how can we receive protection? It's usually taboo to talk about it"  
– Yuni (union)

Yuni (union) might be the only one who speaks up about her experience with sexual harassment. For this reason, I feel the need to bring this topic up as one of the understandings of decent working conditions for domestic workers in Indonesia. According to Yuni (union), there are a lot of these cases happening, but many chose to stay silent, or they might not be aware that they were being sexually harassed. Maybe some of my participants actually also experienced this, but they chose not to tell me because, like Yuni (union) said, people think it is taboo to talk about this subject.

A lot of sexual harassment cases happened, especially for those who live with their employer, because, like Peggie Smith discussed, it is hard to recognize and regulate homes as workplaces, especially when the homes are not the workers' own (Blackket, 2017:36), which is why a lot of sexual harassment or violence occurs to them, and sometimes it is hard to punish it as there is still no regulation for domestic workers in Indonesia. Like what I have discussed above, Jala-PRT recorded that there are 1,635 cases of multi-violence against domestic workers in Indonesia that resulted in fatalities, some of which may be sexual harassment cases.

This is probably why the union is needed because many domestic workers in Indonesia are not affiliated with organizations or unions, which hinders them from understanding about decent working conditions for domestic workers (Ujiyanto, 2019:113). Meanwhile, although I have discussed and mentioned several stories from the domestic workers that are part of the union above, based on the interviews, all of the domestic workers who are part of the union showed that they understood what it means to have decent working conditions

because they learned through their organizations. Yuni (union) is probably the best example, of how the union empower her. Because she is part of the union, she is not afraid to speak up about sensitive matter, because she knows she has the resources and tool needed if something were happened to her. She has her organization to back her up and support her.

Another example of how the union has helped Yuni (union) to fight for her rights was when she was suddenly accused of making her colleague ran away from her employer's house. She was suddenly forced to quit her job, but she felt it was unfair and her employer wrongfully accused her. Her organization helped her to solve this matter by working with pro bono attorney in Indonesia.

“Because I’m part of the organization, I’m not afraid to speak up. I’m not afraid if we have to go to the court to solve unfair treatment for domestic workers like us.” -Yuni (union)

“My organization is like my support system. We could work together to help our colleagues if something happened to them, for example, if their employer paid their salaries late.” – Tina (union)

In addition to that, when I asked about decent working conditions to other participants who are part of the union, they all knew very well the list of standard working conditions according to the ILO.

“Working a minimum of 8 hours with salaries following the regional or district standard, having a time off, annual leave, menstrual leave, to have social protection, and written work contract.” -Ari (union)

“To have social security, health insurance and working contract are really important, but it is still very hard to obtain it here.” -Tina (union)

“To have decent working condition means the Domestic Workers Protection Bill should be passed. Everything is in there. If we have the bill to protect us, we will have decent working conditions.” Sita (union)

The participants said that having a work contract is important, but it is still hard to obtain because they said that it is not only them who should be educated but also the employer about their existence as workers and their rights to have decent working conditions. However, because of the union, they feel like they have more protection and power to bargain to their employer about their working conditions, which mostly related to salaries.

However, Yuni (union) shared that even though she has more bargaining power because of the union, sometimes she has to hide the fact that she is part of the union because some employers do not want to hire her when they know she is part of the union. This is aligned

with Marxist theory, which says that “a second and equally daunting obstacle is that, in the case of some workers, collective organization might, in fact, make them worse off” (Chibber, 2022:65). It is deeply regretted that although Yuni (union) is already educated and part of the union, because she works as a domestic worker and needs the job in order to survive, she has no choice but to adapt to her employers because it is the only way for her to be hired.

All in all, it can be seen that the union has a role in making domestic workers in Indonesia understand decent working conditions and their entitlement towards it. It might be a long way to go for domestic workers to work in decent working conditions like what the ILO idealized if the Domestic Workers Protection Bill still has not been passed. But by having them educated, they will know their value as workers. Just like Hauf (2015:138) and Brill (2021:22) discussed, the concept of decent work gained a positive response because of its inclusiveness and a breath of fresh air towards recognizing non-standard employment, informal workers, and unpaid reproductive labor, many of whom are women.

## Chapter 8

# The Meaning of Being Part of the Family

*“Relations between domestic workers and users in Indonesia are not considered as industrial relations, but paternalistic.” (Bastari, 2018:44)*

This final chapter before the ending shall begin with my story with my domestic worker. Previously in the prologue, I elaborated on how my domestic worker has taken care of me ever since I was a little kid, and because of this, it formed the idea that she is related to myself and my family in some way. My family never differentiated her; when she was still unmarried, my family even allowed her to bring her boyfriend to our house as if she were introducing her boyfriend to her own parents. On the weekends, if she wanted to go out, my parents would definitely permit her. The treatment was just like how my parents treated me as their own child. She is also currently living with her son in my house, and my parents treat her son as if he were their grandchild. Even so, I still sense certain boundaries that make me feel that she is not really a part of the family. For example, when my family goes on a holiday, my domestic worker has to stay at home to look after the house. She also has to cook for my family every single day, and my mother often orders her around. In contrast to me, my mother rarely ordered me around, and I am not required to do household chores every day like my domestic worker. However, because my domestic worker considers my family as if it were her own, she is also not afraid to speak up and say no as well as communicate her needs to my family. To me, I still cannot see my domestic worker as a worker because she is beyond just a mere “worker”. I do not know whether we can shift this familial relationship into an employer-employee relationship because we have formed such a strong bond for more than 19 years. It made me question whether my family, as an employer, somehow unconsciously exploits her by making her part of the family.

From my own experience, it brings me to one and the most interesting finding that I found from interviewing all my participants and I can somehow relate. Surprisingly just like the story and my experience with my domestic worker, for my participants, both from non-union and who are part of unions and are educated about their rights, they want their employers to treat them as if they are part of the family. They think that by being part of the family, the work that they do feels less burdensome, and they are more comfortable in this kind of work environment, thus, they see this as a positive action instead of a negative action.

“Thank God I met many good employers. So, we are treated like their own family, not like domestic workers, we are not considered workers, but we are considered family.” – Sita, (union)

“Thank God, I work while gossiping with my employer. Here, they do not consider us as a domestic worker.” – Tina (union)

Another participant also said she felt very welcomed by her employer because they never differentiate her.

“So far, my experiences as a domestic worker was always nice. I always got employers who treated me really well. They never treated me like a stranger, we usually ate together like a family.” -Mira (non-union)

It seems that the sense of belonging to one’s family, especially for domestic workers who have worked for many years, is important because they have spent more or less half of their lives living with their employers. For example, one of the participants who has worked with her employer for 10 years since she was 16 years old, told me that she likes to work for her employer because they treat her like their own family, and she mentioned this several times.

“Here they consider me like a family, not like a worker. They also pay attention to my health and the food that I eat, so I don't feel like I'm working here; it's just like how we are with our family.”

“Yes, even my son lives with me and my employer. My husband also lives here because he works as a driver. My employer really loves my son, they like him because they said the house became livelier.”

– Rina (non-union)

Dita (non-union) also said that she felt like she belongs to her employer’s family as she already worked for them for 13 years.

“I’m free to do whatever I want in my employer’s house, for example, if I’m tired, I will just take a rest. We’re like a family and her child that I take care of feels like my own.” -Dita (non-union)

Rina’s (non-union) experience is very similar to that of my domestic worker; when I interviewed her, it reminded me of my own. Both of them have worked with the same employers for ten years or more, and they even brought their children to live with them. For domestic workers who have worked with their employers for a long time, their understanding of decent working conditions might be to be included in the family because their employers’ house has become their comfort zone, as they spent more than half of their lives there. Accordingly, the notion of being part of the family has evolved into their social reality because, for them, being a domestic worker implies being part of the employer’s family. This too applies to the other participants, who also said that they like to be treated as if they are part of the family.

While it is not unexpected for domestic workers who are not part of the union to express that they would like to be included in the family, it is actually quite surprising to hear the same thought from those who are part of the union, as they are knowledgeable about the decent working conditions outlined in the Domestic Workers Protection Bill and that there should be boundaries between employer and employee. The family-like preference can be explained by what Muryanti et al. (2015:450) discussed: that implementing regulations for domestic workers in Indonesia may be difficult because it ignores the situation on the field where a family-like relationship has existed for generations, which is still preferable for both employees and employers until now. Additionally, Chen (2011:172) asserted that most domestic workers and their employers share intimate relationships, and many of them are often not regulated because of the agreement between both parties. Lastly, Bastari (2018:44) further explained that this familial relationship between a domestic worker and their employer is because “domestic workers in Indonesia are treated as family members in the household, and the regulation on them is left to family policy, just like the government cannot regulate how parents raise their own children.” For these reasons, most domestic workers welcome the idea of being part of the family, even those who are part of the union.

Integrating my personal experience as someone who is from the employer’s side, just as I have questioned this in the introduction of this chapter, by making my domestic worker a part of the family leads me to question whether this is some kind of way to exploit her as a worker. Considering the participants’ experiences where they prefer to be treated like family and see this treatment as a decent work condition for them, is this justifying the fact that being part of the family means decent work conditions? Or is it just another way to justify modern slavery? The ILO created Convention No. 189 to help recognize domestic work as real work and to finally bring value to domestic workers. As Pape (2016:190) mentioned, the convention aims to prevent exploitation and undervaluation of domestic workers in the eyes of their employers, but in reality, the meaning of decent work for domestic workers in Indonesia is to be included in the family, which automatically may devalue them as a worker. Additionally, according to Chen (2011:172), the unequal employer-employee relationship is often made worse due to racial, class, and citizenship factors that result in a variety of exploitative and paternalistic situations.

Perhaps the idea of being part of the family can be further elucidated by Marxist feminist theory, where it explains that this notion generates a false consciousness and permanent duty for domestic workers in Indonesia. This is because Marxist-feminists suggest that historical patriarchy has long institutionalized gender inequality and division of labor, which undervalued women’s labor, viewing it as purely reproductive and performed out of love rather than financial gain (Peterson 2012:15). In addition to that, Marxist-feminist views patriarchy as the capitalist exploitation of domestic workers (Fuchs, 2018:678). Just as Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2013:191) argues that “the devaluation of domestic and care work is the result of its social perception as ‘feminised’ labour.” Based on the Marxist-feminist perspective, it can be seen that society has assigned domestic work as women’s work, where love should be enough



to value it rather than payment. Consequently, this conception somewhat justifies a form of modern slavery by instilling in domestic workers' social reality that being treated like family means decent work. As a result, they often live with their employers, tending to their needs out of a sense of affection, like my domestic worker, who has taken care of me since I was little, or how Dita (non-union) considered her employer's son as if he were her own.

It is undeniable, however, that maybe for the participants that I interviewed, or for domestic workers in Indonesia, that the desire to be seen as a member of the family matter to them and it is actually their need, because all of them feel a sense of belonging when their employer treats them like a family. They even stated that they do not feel like they are working by being treated like a family, it is just how they are with their family. GHAI (2003:113) discussed that safe and healthy working environment should be a part of decent working conditions, and for these domestic workers to be integrated in the family may signifies this. This can actually relate to the concept of moral economy, which according to Sayer (2011, in Bolton et al., 2012:123), "Moral economy can examine the moral and social implications of economic processes and relations for people and their community and how economic practices ought to be to positively affect people's well-being". Through the lens of moral economy, it challenges the discourse of decent working conditions, which suggests that there should be boundaries between employer and employee, meaning they should not be treated like family. However, my participants think that family like relationship with their employer is important, which they consider it as decent working conditions.

Taking Brill's (2021:18) argument again, in order to assess the concept of decent work, there should be a recognition of workers' personal experiences; thus, for domestic workers in Indonesia, for them to be part of the family means decent working conditions. But then, who should define "decent work for domestic workers?"

## Chapter 9

### Conclusion and What Can We Learn So Far...

What can we learn throughout this journey of trying to understand decent working conditions for domestic workers in Indonesia? As this research is exploratory, I brought to light the voices of Indonesian domestic workers through their stories, opinions, and journeys as women, workers, and humans.

First, in understanding decent working conditions, these Indonesian domestic workers think that when they can receive a salary that follows the standard set by the government, such as the regional or district minimum wage, their working conditions, no matter what, can be considered decent. This is not surprising because economic coercion and financial difficulties forced these domestic workers in Indonesia to enter the domestic job market. The concept of decent working conditions by the International Labour Organization, or Domestic Worker Protection Bill, does not really apply to them because they can only think about how to survive and sustain their lives by working as domestic workers.

Some need the money to finance their children's tuition fees; some have no choice but to work because their husbands are unemployed; and some do not want to be a burden for their families. Despite that, it is actually surprising to also hear that domestic workers who are part of the union think that salary is also the standard for decent working conditions for them. So, is salary really means decent working conditions for these Indonesian domestic workers?

Second, after delving deeper into the needs of these Indonesian domestic workers, it became apparent that they also have a desire in various aspects, such as working in a safe environment and being able to take time off and take holidays. Working in a safe environment means not being mentally harassed by their employers. Both of the workers from the union and non-union shared their stories about being mentally harassed and how they wanted their employers to treat them well and to see them as workers. Meanwhile, for domestic workers who are not part of the union, they have the desire to be able to take time off and holidays because they mostly live with their employer and because of this they have limited time to mobilize and socialize.

These perspectives highlight that the understanding of decent working conditions among these Indonesian domestic workers extends beyond just salaries. Little did they know, they actually show that their understanding is related to the ILO Convention No. 189 about decent working conditions. Apart from that, because these workers were being exploited, they demonstrated some kind of resistance by wanting to fight against the exploitation by their employers. Some wanted to make their stories viral on social media, and those who are part of the union can exercise their rights with the help of the organization.

Thirdly, we cannot deny that the union has the capability of shaping the understanding of decent working conditions for domestic workers in Indonesia. Because of the union, those who are affiliated with it understand that there is a concept of decent working conditions for domestic workers, where, as workers, they are entitled to certain standards that will prevent them from being exploited and keep them safe during the work. This concept will also value them as workers and help them be finally recognized as domestic workers, not as household workers, assistants, or maids.

However, applying these concepts in reality is still hard to do, especially if the employers are not educated about them. So, the education about decent working conditions should be two-way, where it includes both the employer and employee. Like the story of Yuni (union), who has to hide her identity as part of the union in order to be hired as a domestic worker because many employers do not want to hire domestic workers who are affiliated with the union. It might be a long way to go for domestic workers to work in decent working conditions like what the ILO idealized, especially if the Domestic Workers Protection Bill still has not been passed. But at least, by having them educated, they will know their value as workers.

Lastly, in understanding decent working conditions, surprisingly, all of these Indonesian domestic workers welcomed the idea of being part of the family. It is very unexpected to hear it from those who are part of the union because they should have understood that in decent working conditions notions, there is a boundary between employer and employee. This phenomenon can actually be explained in accordance with the study by Bastari (2018:44) that “relations between domestic workers and users in Indonesia are not considered as industrial relations, but paternalistic.”

Out of all the findings, this understanding of decent working conditions according to Indonesian domestic workers is the most interesting. Considering how these Indonesian domestic workers prefer to be treated like family and see this treatment as a decent work condition for them, is this some kind of way to justify modern slavery? Or is it a way to justify exploitation? Perhaps this can be explained by Marxist-feminist and moral economy theories. These theories are contradictory to each other, which made me question, “What is the real definition of decent work conditions?”

As a concluding remark, this research has been an eye-opener for myself. Because throughout this research, I have to reflect back on myself as someone who grew up with a domestic worker. I never asked my domestic worker about her needs or whether she was satisfied working with my family. I always assume that she is happy and that she is part of my family. Through exploring the needs and understanding of decent working conditions for domestic workers in Indonesia, I can conclude that they have the same level of understanding. The difference is that for the unionized domestic workers, they know more about the terms and have moral support from the organization. However, for those who are not part of the union, even if they understand about decent working conditions and if they are

being exploited, for example, they do not have any support or friends like those in the union.

To sum up, can we really apply this concept of decent working conditions for domestic workers in Indonesia? Should we first consider the needs of these domestic workers first before applying the concept or should we enforce it so domestic workers can finally be recognized as real workers?

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